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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 341st meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 2 May 2012, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Mr. Diallo ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Update on developments since the previous meeting of the Committee

2. **The Chair**, summarizing some of the activities and developments that had taken place since the Committee's previous meeting, said that the Arab League Summit in Baghdad on 30 March had confirmed that a fair and comprehensive peace in the region would not be achieved without full withdrawal by Israel from the occupied Palestinian and other Arab lands to the borderline of 4 June 1967 and had supported the Palestinian demand for the United Nations to recognize the State of Palestine within the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. President Abbas of the Palestinian Authority had urged the Summit to reactivate the Arab Peace Initiative, a call that was fully supported by the Committee.

3. On 3 and 4 April, the Committee had convened the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine in Geneva on the "Question of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention facilities: legal and political implications", followed by consultations with civil society organizations on 5 April.

4. On 11 April, the Quartet principals had released a statement after their meeting in Washington, welcoming plans for dialogue between the parties and emphasizing its support for the positive efforts by King Abdullah and Foreign Minister Judeh of Jordan. It had called on the international community to donate $1.1 billion in order to meet the Palestinian Authority's 2012 financing requirements. It had also expressed concern over settler violence and incitement in the West Bank and had called on Israel to take effective measures. It had condemned rocket attacks from Gaza and had stressed the need for calm and security for both peoples. It had expressed concern about unilateral and provocative actions, including continued settlement activity.

5. On 17 April, a letter from President Mahmoud Abbas was delivered to the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu by the Chief Palestinian Negotiator, Saeb Erakat, which reiterated Palestinian demands for restarting the peace talks, including an end to settlement building and the acceptance of the pre-1967 borders as the foundation of the two-State solution. A joint statement issued after that meeting said that both sides hoped that the exchange of letters would help to advance peace.

6. On 24 April, the Israeli Government granted legal status to three settlement outposts in the occupied West Bank.

7. On 25 April, the Bureau of the Committee adopted a statement expressing its grave concern at the Israeli decision to legalize three settlement outposts; denouncing Israel's relentless demolition of Palestinian homes and dwellings in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; and calling upon the Security Council to meet its legal obligations and compel Israel to halt and dismantle settlements, in order to safeguard the two-State solution.

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and developments in the political process

8. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) expressed his delegation's gratitude to the Division for Palestinian Rights for organizing the screening of the film *This is my land ... Hebron*. It was important to ensure that the documentary was widely seen by the general public so that the crimes committed in Al-Khalil (Hebron) did not go undocumented or unpunished. He also thanked the 45 countries from different political groups that had participated in the debate in the Security Council that had covered many important political issues and the situation on the ground in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The debate had reflected the general international outrage at Israel's settlement activities and the legalization of the three outposts, as well as strong support for the two-State solution. Unfortunately, that solution was being jeopardized by Israel's colonization campaign. He was puzzled by the lack of political will within the Security Council and the international community to force Israel to comply with international law.

9. A mass hunger strike had been launched by Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention centres on 17 April, in an attempt to secure their release. The protest had received widespread support from the international community, as the release of political prisoners was a precondition for peace. The successful meeting held in Geneva on 3 and 4 April had highlighted the plight of Palestinian prisoners and had led to calls for Governments to state their position and to force Israel to act.

10. Another important political development was the letter sent by President Abbas to Prime Minister Netanyahu, which had summarized the Palestinian Authority's position on the terms of reference, borders and security issues. It had stated that the Palestinian Authority would accept a third party presence to patrol Palestine's borders in order to guarantee the security of both States, but that Israeli soldiers should be withdrawn from the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The letter had been sent further to the request made by the Quartet principals to begin negotiations. However, Israel had failed to respond in writing and there was little reason for optimism as Israel's reaction had been to intensify settlement activities. Moreover, it had recently been announced that Israeli parliamentary elections would be held in September 2012, which would serve as an excuse to stall peace talks still further. He called for Israel to respond positively and to stop its colonization activities. Moreover, Israel should respect previous agreements and release prisoners detained before the Oslo Accords.

11. The statement issued by the Middle East Quartet had fallen short of Palestinian expectations, but he welcomed the expression of concern over settler violence, which should be translated into practical steps to put pressure on Israel to stop protecting the settlers. Lastly, he called on the Committee to advance Palestinians' quest to establish their own State in line with the two-State solution. To that end, the blockade of Gaza should be lifted to allow the economic recovery of the region and the movement of goods, in accordance with international agreements.

12. **Mr. Wright** (Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees Representative Office in New York) said that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) had been established by General Assembly resolution 302 (IV) of 8 December 1949 to carry out direct relief and works programmes for refugees who were residing in Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948. The Agency now provided assistance, protection and advocacy for some 5 million refugees in five areas of operation, namely the West Bank, Gaza, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan. It was a humanitarian development agency and had no political role. The Agency employed a total of 30,000 national staff, who were Palestine refugees, and around 150 international staff funded by the United Nations. It provided an important range of services, including education, basic health care, relief and social services, infrastructure and microfinance, in order to improve the living environments of Palestine refugees and enable them to meet their basic needs.

13. The Israeli occupation continued to have a negative impact on the human rights of the 850,000 Palestine refugees in the West Bank. It was estimated that 1,500 Palestinians, many of them from the Bedouin community, had lost their homes as a result of demolitions and evictions. There had also been a 30 per cent increase in settler violence against Palestinians and refugees; between January and mid-April UNRWA had recorded more than 160 incidents that had resulted in the injury of refugees, including minors.

14. The ongoing blockade of Gaza prevented the Agency from meeting the increasing needs of the 1.2 million refugees there. However, a slight relaxation by the Israeli authorities on restrictions on importing goods into Gaza had allowed the Agency to begin rebuilding schools and homes damaged during Operation Cast Lead in 2008 and 2009. There had been a significant increase in the number of trucks crossing the border into Gaza, but it remained well below the average for 2007. There was a persistent lack of building materials and serious delays in receiving building permits from the Israeli authorities.

15. Palestine refugees in Lebanon also relied heavily on UNRWA services, although it was hoped that amendments to Lebanese labour laws would provide refugees with greater access to the labour market and allow them to be issued with work permits. Work was continuing to rebuild the Nahr el Bared refugee camp in Northern Lebanon after it was destroyed in 2007. However it was estimated that there was a funding shortfall of around $180 million, which could only be remedied by additional contributions from Governments.

16. The 500,000 Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic were relatively well-looked after by the Syrian authorities, but the ongoing conflict in that country had had a direct effect on UNRWA services, particularly with regard to education and health. Many refugees had lost access to the temporary labour market and their movements had been restricted. Additional support was needed from the international community, in the form of monetary donations, food and educational materials. An estimated $28 million was needed to fund refugee services. The situation in Jordan, which had provided shelter to some 2 million

refugees, was much better, although there were still obstacles to ensuring the quality and operation of the Agency's services.

17. The biggest obstacle to providing services to the 5 million refugees throughout the region was the lack of financial resources. The Agency's total budget was $1.3 billion, including $620 million for the General Fund, which was used to implement basic health, education, relief and protection activities. There was an expected deficit of $55 million in the General Fund for 2012, despite the generosity of the major donors, namely the European Union, the United States of America, Japan and Australia, who were responsible for 80 per cent of contributions. In recent years, Arab States, such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, had contributed substantially to UNRWA, and Brazil had recently donated $7.5 million. He also thanked Indonesia, Malaysia and Kazakhstan for their donations and acknowledged the increased support from other Asian countries. The Agency was making every effort to diversify its funding base; however, much remained to be done. He appealed to the international community to continue supporting its work, which was crucial until such time as a just and durable solution was found for the Palestine refugees living in the Middle East.

18. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) echoed the call for additional financial support for UNWRA and called on all members of the Committee to give generously so that the Agency could fulfil its mandate until a solution was found. The donation from Brazil was welcome; he hoped that it would be an annual donation.

Report on the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine and the consultations with civil society organizations, UNOG, 3-5 April 2012

19. **Mr. Grima** (Malta), Rapporteur, said that the United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine, held in Geneva on 3 and 4 April, had been devoted exclusively to the issue of Palestinian political prisoners in Israeli prisons and detention facilities. The Meeting had been attended by representatives of Governments, Palestine, intergovernmental organizations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), United Nations entities, civil society organizations and the media, as well as a delegation from the Committee.

20. Participants had called on Israel to respect its international obligations, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. The question of Palestinian political prisoners was now one of the permanent status issues. Ending the practice of administrative detention and releasing Palestinian prisoners incarcerated before the Oslo Accords would be an important gesture by Israel towards facilitating the resumption of permanent status negotiations.

21. In the light of the political and human rights abuses suffered by Palestinian prisoners, the Palestinian Authority Minister for Prisoner's Affairs, Mr. Issa Qaraqe, had called for an international fact-finding mission under the auspices of the United Nations to determine the conditions of detention and for a conference of High Contracting Parties to the Geneva Conventions to be convened to ensure respect for international humanitarian law.

22. In plenary meetings, participants had discussed the conditions of detention and the psychological effects of incarceration, particularly on women and children. Details of programmes run by the Ministry of Prisoners' Affairs and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to rehabilitate and reintegrate former prisoners had also been provided. Israeli recourse to detention without trial, so-called administrative detention, had been sharply criticized. Experts had also debated the applicability of the Fourth Geneva Convention, given that Israel refused to recognize Palestinian combatants as political prisoners. They were labelled as ordinary criminals or, more usually, as terrorists. The use of military courts to try Palestinian prisoners had also been condemned. Available legal mechanisms to ensure compliance with international humanitarian and human rights law had been discussed, as had the experiences of Namibia, South Africa and Northern Ireland in resolving the matter of political prisoners as a precondition for peace. All speakers had agreed on the need to maintain international pressure on Israel to comply with international law.

23. The Meeting had been followed by consultations with civil society organizations active on the question of Palestine. Representatives from 12 civil society organizations had participated in a frank and constructive exchange on ways to improve cooperation in support of the Palestinian cause, which included organizing parallel events during the sessions of the Human Rights Council. They had called upon the Committee to support their boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign against Israel and for the Division

to enhance its links with civil society organizations in order to strengthen support for the Committee's goals.

24. The Committee delegation had also held meetings with the Special Representative of Switzerland for the Middle East on how best to support efforts to convene a conference of High Contracting Parties; with senior officials from the ICRC, on the situation of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention facilities and the possible effects of the universal recognition of the State of Palestine on the prisoner issue; with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) on the outcome of the recent session of the Human Rights Council and the preparations for the mandated fact-finding mission to investigate the implications of Israeli settlements on the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of the Palestinian people; and with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to establish the cost of the Israeli occupation to the Palestinian economy further to the United Nations Seminar on Assistance to Palestinian People held in Cairo on 6 and 7 February.

25. Lastly, all papers of the International Meeting, including press releases and the comprehensive report by the Secretariat, would be issued and published on the Division's website.

26. *The Committee took note of the report.*

United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine and United Nations Meeting of Civil Society in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Paris, 30 May to 1 June 2012

27. **The Chair**, drawing attention to Working Paper No. 2, said that the theme of the International Meeting on the Question of Palestine would be the role of youth and women in the peaceful resolution of the question of Palestine. The Civil Society Meeting would discuss "Civil Society action towards ending the occupation: Harnessing the power of youth and women". The events would focus on how to empower women and young people through education, training and economic opportunities and how to include them more in the political process. They would also examine the impact of social media networks on creating an open Palestinian society and how the international community could better coordinate its efforts with Palestinian and Israeli youth and women's organizations to achieve a peaceful solution to the question of Palestine. Internationally renowned experts had been invited to give presentations and invitations had been sent to all States Members and Observers of the United Nations, as well as parliamentarians, representatives of United Nations entities and other intergovernmental organizations, representatives of civil society and the media.

28. *The Committee approved the provisional programme for the two meetings as contained in Working Paper No. 2.*

Other matters

29. **The Chair** informed the Committee that the Palestinian Chief Negotiator had been invited to brief the Committee on the political process at its next meeting.

The meeting rose at 4.15 p.m.